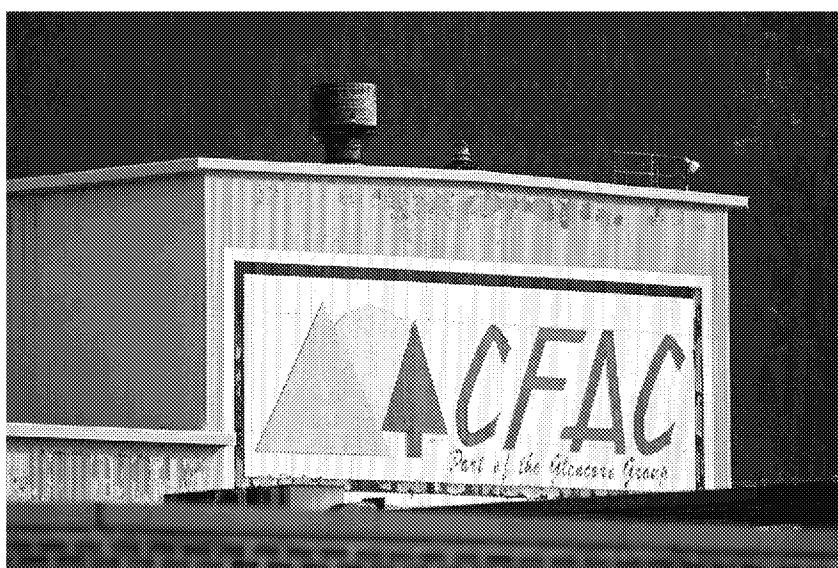


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# EPA to Propose Superfund Listing for CFAC Site

Environmental agency announces intent to list contaminated site as priority for federal cleanup

BY TRISTAN SCOTT // MAR 6, 2015 // NEWS & FEATURES



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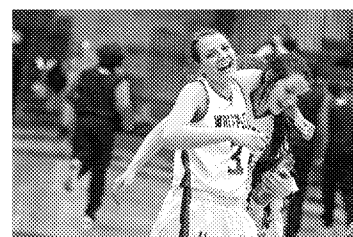
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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will propose adding the shuttered Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. plant site to the federal Superfund Program's National Priorities List, according to a letter the agency sent March 4 to Gov. Steve Bullock.

Echoing concerns of local residents and lawmakers, Bullock recently urged EPA Regional Administrator Shaun McGrath to proceed with listing the site on

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the federal priority list and move forward with cleanup of the 2,500-acre site, located on the banks of the Flathead River at the gateway to Glacier National Park.

“I’m concerned that if this issue remains unaddressed, the contamination from the site is serious enough to pose long-term risks to the community and to Montana’s environment, including the Flathead River,” Bullock stated in his letter.



On March 4, one day after CFAC officials announced the plant had permanently closed after years of efforts to reopen the aluminum reduction facility, McGrath wrote Bullock that the agency would move forward with a proposed listing.

“I am pleased to report that we expect to propose the site for listing when the next NPL update is published in the Federal Register, currently scheduled for March 2015,” according to McGrath’s letter.

After the close of a 60-day comment period, the EPA will make a final listing decision after considering all comments received.

Bullock’s letter came just over a month after Montana Sen. Jon Tester penned a letter to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy similarly pushing for a Superfund listing for CFAC.

Reports from the state DEQ and the EPA showed the site was eligible for Superfund status after potentially hazardous materials were discovered in soil, groundwater and surface water at the plant site, and cyanide contamination was found in sediment in the Flathead River.

But the site’s owner, Glencore, a Swiss commodities firm, has never explained what it wishes to do with the site. And while company officials say they are committed to a “long term, sustainable solution” for the shuttered plant, they have opposed Superfund listing.

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Haley Beaudry, a spokesman for CFAC, said Superfund listing would devalue the property and unnecessarily delay the cleanup. Instead, he and other CFAC officials hoped to develop an independent remedial investigation work plan through a private environmental consulting firm, the New York-based Roux Associates.

“We are going to push for redevelopment of that site, however Superfund listing will delay redevelopment for a long time,” Beaudry said. “We don’t know how long. The Superfund law is 31 years old, and some Montana sites have been on the list for that entire time. I am 100 percent sure listing would compromise the prospects for redevelopment. And people don’t like to live next door to a Superfund site so the property around there in my opinion loses value.”

Bullock said that adding another Superfund site to Montana does not blight the state or the property, but rather demonstrates a commitment to environmental responsibility and maintaining Montana’s pristine quality.

“A state of 147,000 square miles where we have incredible natural beauty that draws people from all around the world, people who come here to enjoy our clean air and clean water, I don’t think another listing deters from that,” Bullock told the Beacon in an interview Friday. “I think another listing underscores our real intent to make sure that we do maintain our clean air and clean water.”

According to the letter McGrath sent to Bullock, the EPA was sensitive to the community’s stake in the site, its cleanup and redevelopment, and support for a federal cleanup was evident at a series public meetings held in late 2014.

“As the investigation continues, domestic wells will be sampled to better understand the potential risk to nearby residents in order to remedy any immediate concerns as well as to ensure the long-term cleanup will be protective,” McGrath wrote. “The EPA is committed to working cooperatively with the community, including the city of Columbia Falls, Flathead County and the site owners to ensure the cleanup will address the human health and environmental concerns while considering the site owner’s and the community’s redevelopment goals. Here, and in other

communities, the EPA has been committed to alerting the community about upcoming contract opportunities and hiring local labor whenever possible.”

The EPA’s decision to move forward with the proposed listing comes after both Bullock and Tester sent separate letters after negotiations to broker a cleanup deal broke down between CFAC, Glencore and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality over how to proceed with remediation and assessment of the site.

In an emailed statement, Tester said it’s time to move forward with cleanup after years of unnecessary delays and empty promises from Glencore.

“Glencore spent years stringing the community of Columbia Falls along about the future of CFAC, and today it finally cut the strings,” Tester said. “Now it’s time to clean up the site, ensure CFAC workers are treated fairly and use the area to invest in the future of Columbia Falls.”

The plant operated from 1955 to 2009 and at its peak employed 1,500 people. Since 2009, a handful of employees have remained on site to maintain the mothballed, 800-acre facility, which sits on a 2,500-acre property.

“While this decision marks the end of aluminum production in Montana, it also paves the way for the possibility of finding alternative uses for this strategic property,” company officials said in a press release. “The decision to permanently close was a difficult one, but after deep consideration, management is confident it is in the best interests of the community.”

In the March 3 press release, the company stated that as part of the closure it would demolish certain structures on the site. It added that it would comply with all rules and regulations to ensure the looming environmental cleanup was done safely.

“We look forward to working through this next chapter in as timely a manner as possible and helping bring new industry to Columbia Falls,” officials concluded in their statement.

The NPL is the list of national priorities among the known releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants throughout the United States. It is used to guide the EPA in determining which sites warrant further investigation.

The CFAC plant began producing aluminum in 1955, with production reaching 180,000 tons of aluminum by 1968. At its height, the plant employed 1,500 people and was central to the area's economy.

When it shut down at the end of October 2009, the closure forced the layoff of nearly 90 workers as high-energy prices and poor market conditions made operations unprofitable.

Once listed, past and present owners would be assigned cleanup costs; if they are unwilling to pay, the cleanup can move forward with money from the Superfund program.

Still, it could take years before cleanup work begins.

Following listing, EPA conducts a remedial investigation of the site that could continue over several seasons as it collects data, followed by a feasibility study and a remedial design. It also depends on cooperation from responsible parties.

“Up-front negotiations could take some time. We have a suite of potentially responsible parties,” Julie DalSoglio of the EPA told community members at a public meeting in December 2014.

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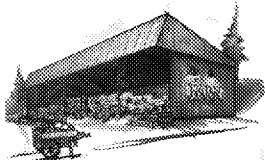
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